

Choosing a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan



Senior Health Insurance
Information Program

Ask SHIIP

Doris Higgins
Area Program Manager

Q: I want to sign up for a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan. With so many plans how do I choose?

A: Choice can be good, but 42 stand alone plans and 9 managed care options can seem a bit overwhelming.

One option is to call all the companies, order their materials and then try to compare. A better option is to use the plan finder web-based tool on www.medicare.gov. While you may not be on the Internet, remember that you do not have to be the one to do the web search. The important thing is the information that is available on line, not how you get it. You may have a neighbor, friend, or family member who would be happy to help you. You can also call 1-800-Medicare 24/7 and their operators will help you choose a plan. You can also call SHIIP at 1-800-452-4800 to find a local SHIIP volunteer who will help you with the search.

Before going online you need to have a list of your medications along with the dosages. It might also be helpful to have the cost of the medications and your Medicare number handy.

The plan finder will lead you through a list of questions intended to narrow your search to the companies that cover your medications. Depending on how many, or which drugs you take, you may not find a plan that covers all your medications. If this happens, try your search again with your most expensive or most medically important medications.

Then you will need to find out about getting your other medications covered. You need to talk to your doctor to see if you can switch medications to ones that are listed on the plan's formulary (list of covered drugs). If this is not possible, you can appeal to the plan to cover your needed medications. As a person with Medicare you have extra protections to help you get the medicines you need.

Most likely you will find more than one plan that covers your medications. Here are some factors to use as tiebreakers:

Cost: Consider the cost of your specific medications

under each plan. Also review co-pay, coinsurance, premium and deductible amounts. This is another case of do the math.

Convenience: Which of the plans work with the pharmacy you like? Does it have a mail order option? If you travel, check to see if the plan offers national coverage.

Coverage: Although you can choose a company based on your current medications it is important to consider what happens if you need a new medication. Medicare has established a list of the top 100 drugs used by people with Medicare. The plans will be able to tell you how many of those they cover.

Important! Although you may be tempted to choose a plan based on the company, it is in your best interest to pick a plan based on "who covers my medications?"

Note: Another way to receive prescription coverage is through a Medicare Advantage Plan. For additional information visit www.medicare.gov, or call 1-800-Medicare, or SHIIP at 1-800-452-4800.

Source: www.medicare.gov

Address your questions to:

Ask SHIIP
311 W. Washington St, Ste. 300
Indianapolis, IN 46204
Or www.in.gov/idoi/shiip
1-800-452-4800 to request a
complete list of Prescription Drug
Plans available in Indiana

November 15, 2005: Sign up begins for Medicare Prescription Drug Plans. Other insurance should be sending you **letters** about your current prescription coverage and whether it is as good as, or better than, Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage.

SHIIP is a free, unbiased counseling program provided by the Indiana State Department of Insurance. For assistance, call your local SHIIP site to make an appointment or call the state office at 1-800-452-4800 to obtain a list of local SHIIP sites.